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John Smith's Letter
to Rev. G. B. Macdonald,
Derby, 1832.

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A LETTER

TO THE

Rev. G. B. MACDONALD,

WESLEYAN MINISTER, DERBY,

ON A FEW PROMINENT FEATURES OF HIS
STRANGE PERVERSION OF TRUTHS MISCALLED

“FACTS AGAINST FICTION,”

BY

MR. JOHN SMITH,

WESLEYAN LOCAL PREACHER, BELPER,

“Nusquam tuta fides!”

DERBY:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY T. WARD, 45, SADLER GATE.

Price Three-pence.

1832.

BW 406
S5 L4

The writer of the following Letter had no expectation of it meeting the public eye, but having favoured us with a sight of it, we thought it deserved greater publicity than he intended, and have therefore taken the liberty of putting it in Print. Had he not understood that a full exposure of Mr. M's unaccountable production was in contemplation, Mr. S. would probably have more completely unveiled his casuistical sophistry.

Wes. 1454

A LETTER.

DEAR SIR,

When I first had your pamphlet entitled "Facts against Fiction" put into my hand, I felt a strong desire to write a few lines to you, in reply to some of the observations contained in it; but when I considered the painful dispensation of Providence through which you were at that time passing, I felt very reluctant to say any thing which would be calculated to give pain to an individual, whom on many accounts I greatly respect; and probably should have abandoned the intention of doing so altogether had I not been informed you were about publishing a second Edition of that work with additions: if information had reached me that you intended publishing a second edition, in which the errors of the first would be corrected, you would probably not have now been troubled with a communication from me. I confess I am somewhat surprised at the information, because you have stated in the concluding paragraph, that "no tauntings or quibblings in the form of a reply, will induce us to continue this controversy." That a reply to it has been meditated, is very evident from the Advertisement in the

Derby Paper of last week, and as any addition to your work must be considered in the light of a continuation of the controversy, I am surprised that you should venture on such a step; I have therefore taken the liberty of addressing you, before you again place yourself before the public.

Before I commence my remarks upon your Pamphlet, and upon the unhappy division which has taken place in the Methodist Society in the Derby Circuit, I beg leave to say that I am decidedly opposed to the opinion inculcated by some, that *Division is better than unity*; I can no more believe Messrs. Treffry and Isaac, than I can believe some of my Derby friends, both of those who have left and those who remain, when they say so. I have seen too much of the ill effects of Division in years long gone by, to allow me for a moment to entertain such an opinion. It has been my lot to be placed where Divisions have taken place in the Societies with which I have been connected three times before this, and in every case the effects have been awful: Have laboured in some instances to reconcile contending parties, and am happy to say, I have not altogether laboured in vain; and in the Division which has now taken place, I made some efforts of the same kind though I am very sorry to say they were opposed by one who (I had fondly hoped) would have acted in a very different manner. As it

seems very unlikely now that a reunion will be effected, I think it would be the better course to leave the thing as it is, rather than further agitate it; but as it appears you have determined on a different plan, I hope you will bear with me in the remarks which may escape my pen, and attribute all I say to its real motive, a desire to serve the cause of God. Perhaps you may be led to inquire what business *I* have to interfere with the concerns of Methodism in the Derby Circuit? I answer, because I am interested in the welfare of Methodism in every place, and particularly so on many accounts with Methodism in the Derby Circuit; as that in which I got my first good,—in which I have many kind friends,—as a Trustee of Chapels in the Derby Circuit, and also because the effects of this Division extend to this, and are likely greatly to affect and injure it; but principally, because much misapprehension and mistake have gone abroad into the world by those statements, which you and others have given of this unfortunate affair. These, I think, are reasons quite sufficient to form an apology for my addressing you. It might be added, I conceive myself almost as competent to give an opinion upon Methodism in Derby Circuit as Mr. Davis, and some other official persons in it are. I was a member of the Methodist Society in the Derby Circuit more than 12

years, and have lived on terms of intimacy with a considerable number of the principal friends in the same for more than twenty years since I left it; and have been informed of perhaps most of the important occurrences which have taken place in it during that time, and am quite satisfied that a Division of the Society was not more called for three months ago than it was 25 years since.

You state page 45, concerning the seceders "*much difficulty lay in the way of bringing home tangibly to some of them*" the heretical views which they were well known to entertain. Now Sir, to my knowledge more than five and twenty years ago, there were persons well known as Local Preachers on the Derby plan, whose views were much more heretical than those with which the persons are charged, who were put away by the Leaders' Meeting. It was well known that one denied the Doctrine of Original Sin, having embraced Dr. Taylor's views on that point; another believed all the peculiarities of Calvinism; another positively and explicitly asserted both in and out of the pulpit, "a justified person would not go to heaven," and "believe you are saved and you are saved;" and there were others who could not be considered *sound in the Faith*; and yet all these were allowed to preach, and to be official members of Society: and notwithstanding the boasted

pretensions of your last Quarterly Meeting "a stricter examination on all points of Methodist Doctrine;" one of your Local Preachers *not many* weeks ago, in my hearing asserted, "True Believers who were happy in God had to sorrow and mourn over the depravity of their hearts like the Apostle when he complained, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death;" as well as other things, as bad at least as those which are charged upon these persons who hold heretical doctrines; indeed one who has been a regular travelling Preacher, who heard the same Sermon, pronounced upon it in my hearing, that it was part of it Calvinism.—But the real fact of the case, in reference to some or all of those who are now separated from you is, they are not *far from Wesleyan Orthodoxy*; you will probably call to your remembrance a conversation which I had with you, the last time I had the pleasure of seeing you at my house, in which, you stated in reference to opinions held by the persons in question, the *difference was more in words than in things, and that there was but a shade of difference between them, and what is called Wesleyan Orthodoxy*; which remarks quite accorded with my views upon the subject: you will also remember another remark, "that we should not form an opinion from what was uttered by a few ignorant, extravagant persons

among them, but upon their real opinions, as explained by themselves in a cool dispassionate manner." I am now ready to question, Sir, whether there has been so much extravagance among them as has been imputed to them. I think if there had, there must have been abundant opportunities of bringing something home in a "*tangible shape*," which *would have sealed their doom*, but as their doom *has not been sealed by their heterodoxy*; I must conclude they have given their enemies no hold upon them on that ground.

Your pamphlet professes to be "*A statement of the real causes which led to the Division, &c.*" and you wish it to be understood, that "*alienation of affection which led to difference in doctrine, was the cause*;" how astonishing that only a shade of difference, and that more in word than in the thing, should produce such an effect!!! As to *alienation of affection*, if such had been the case, they were not bound to Methodism, they might have left the Society, without changing their opinions on doctrinal points; but I am quite satisfied this was not *the real cause*: they had a great deal more affection for Methodism than thousands who remain connected with it, and deprecated a separation from it, and were willing to suffer almost any thing sooner than become a separate body. Now, Sir, I am grieved, that you should wish to keep

out of sight the *real cause*, and palm upon those who do not know the difference, a *false one*; the real cause you well know was the resolution which was passed at the Leaders' Meeting for the expulsion of four Local Preachers;—for what they who are now separated, considered an unjust and unmethodistical proceeding;—and from which I am quite satisfied nine out of ten persons in the Methodist connexion, if they knew the whole case would think the same;—this was the *real cause* of the Division; and being thought by many to be such an act of oppression as was not likely to be redressed, in consequence of the offended party being judge in that meeting, and of his being Chairman of the District; they conceived they could have no redress from any other quarter, and therefore, resolved immediately to unite together and work by themselves.

I am of opinion that they have acted very unwisely in doing so. I think they ought not to have published their case to the world, nor to have separated at all, until every opportunity of obtaining redress had been fruitless. I am fully satisfied that neither the District meeting nor the Conference would have sanctioned such a Proceeding from any Leaders' meeting of *trying men for one thing, and punishing them for another*; and consequently the Superintendent would have been reproved for what he had done,

in allowing such a resolution to pass a Leaders' meeting. I am sorry that you endeavour to give a gloss to the resolution itself which it does not deserve. You insinuate that though four persons were at first mentioned, that only three were at last included in it. Now Sir, you know the resolution was passed by that meeting to expel four; one of whom was absent from the meeting and knew nothing about it. And is it possible that the laws of Methodism should be such as to allow a man to be tried and condemned without being heard, or having an opportunity of being heard!!! I wonder whether any individual in that meeting would like to be treated so, "*this is indeed too bad.*" But you say they "*merited expulsion for violating the laws of a voluntary Society, and therefore no act of injustice is done to them;*" but it would have been much more satisfactory to me, and to others, if you had stated what laws of the Methodist Society they had broken; you have not done this, and therefore, I hope your *Second Edition with additions will set us at rest* on that point; because proofs are much more satisfactory than assertions from *any one*. In that case something in a "tangible shape" would have, without difficulty, been brought against them. But according to your own shewing, that resolution did not recognize any breach of rule, only what some one was

pleased to call an outrage on the superintendent, and the meeting; and this resolution it appears, was prepared by the individual before he had heard the whole case, and was brought in his pocket ready for the occasion!!! But what was this outrage? and who was the cause of it? *My* firm and unhesitating opinion is, that the *Superintendent caused it by his very injudicious* conduct on that occasion, by *making such a communication at such a time respecting Female Preaching and by ordering the lights to be put out.*

I think, Sir, "thirty years' experience" must have been lost upon Mr. D. on that occasion, if he thought such conduct would be borne patiently, unless he really was seeking occasion for war;—If indeed he went to the Meeting for *the purpose of giving offence*, then he acted in a manner very consistent with his purpose; but if he went with the motive of conducting the meeting for the profit of the people who attended, he acted most injudiciously, and instead of *him* bringing the case to a Leaders' Meeting and sitting as judge upon it, he should have been gently rebuked by the Leaders' Meeting for his injudicious proceedings.

I am not prepared to go the length which some go respecting Female Preaching, but am not disposed on the other hand, to sneer at every thing of this kind, or to speak in terms of contempt of all the "*Gifted Sis-*

ters," and while on this subject, I will just notice another error into which you have fallen respecting Mrs. Fletcher, you state that "she never preached in the presence of a Minister :". A preacher not 100 miles from you in reading your pamphlet, wrote upon that part of it "false, I (mentioning his name) have sat to hear her and with her knowledge." But you are well aware there are very different opinions and usages in the Methodist Connexion respecting Female preaching, and if the Conference have published rules *which they expect to be attended to*, why do they not call to account those Superintendents who do not execute them ? You are aware there are females who are *sanctioned as Preachers*, in several circuits not far from Derby, as well as in other parts of the Connexion, and I think it very ill becomes any one, either yourself or your *Rev. Brother* in Derby, whoever he may be, and he certainly does wisely in concealing his name, to pass so sweeping a censure as has been done upon Female Preaching, while there are either "*Ranthers*," or Quakers or Wesleyan Methodists in England ; and while so many great and good men have entertained different views of the meaning of St. Paul, when he speaks of "those women who laboured with him in the Gospel," if Mr. D. had determined not to allow as much liberty to our "Gifted Sisters" as his prede-

cessors had done, I think it would have been a wiser course for him to have informed the Trustees of the different Chapels, that he was responsible for the manner in which those chapels were occupied ; and directed them not to *invite or allow any female to preach in them*, at the same time he might have conversed with the “gifted Sisters,” whom he conceived were deluded, respecting their call to preach, and by kind and affectionate means have endeavoured to bring them to a right mind ! Instead of this he (I suppose for the first time,) announces his determination to suppress female preaching, in a Meeting where there were near 300 persons present, many of whom he had reason to believe were favourable to it, and because near fifty of these persons expressed their disapprobation of what he said, he selected four of the rest (three of whom never spoke till he had closed the Meeting,) for the purpose of wreaking his vengeance upon them ; while at the same time it was very evident this pretended “outrage” would not have been committed, if it had not been for his injudicious conduct. I think, Sir, “thirty years experience” must have been lost upon Mr. D. if (only a few days after he had declared he should not be surprised to hear of some of *these women* predicting the destruction of the Town in 24 hours, nor of them being with child of another Shiloh ;) he

had calculated upon their having as much patience as to receive such an announcement in perfect silence ; he must have indeed calculated upon their “superior sanctity” to an amazing extent, if he thought it would go down well.

Sir, blame no one for rash expressions if you exculpate him for the rash expression just alluded to : my opinion is, that if the District Meeting do not require him to ask pardon of the parties he has thus wickedly slandered as the condition of his continuing a Preacher until Conference, they will not do their duty. You, Sir, know some of them, and “their communications,” and you know that nothing in a “*tangible shape*” could be brought against any of them, or it would have been long ago. Is not this then bearing false witness against his neighbour. Is this the Charity which “thinketh no evil,” but which “hopeth all things.”—but perhaps you will excuse him on the ground that he does not pretend to such “*Superior Sanctity*,” and therefore so much cannot be expected from him : well if these excuses will do for others they will not do for me.—As a minister he should be an example to his flock, and let his flock follow such an example, and what will they not say of him ?

If I were disposed to quarrel with you, I might notice several other parts of your pamphlet, and could point out wherein they

could not be found of full weight, when weighed by the standard which you have erected by saying, "*the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.*" As I cannot think you have knowingly "set down aught in malice," but that your misstatements have arisen from the wrong accounts which you have received from others, of things which you were not an eye-witness of, I shall pass over, still entertaining a hope that you will revise and correct every error which you have had pointed out to you by others.

I cannot however pass over the case of Mr. Bennett unnoticed : you seem to have directed your envenomed shafts principally at him, although some others have not escaped your attention, and I ask you, Sir, whether you would like to be treated in the same way in which he has been treated. It has been admitted on all hands, that his examination at the District Meeting was unusually strict, that if his phraseology was somewhat different from that of the Methodists generally, yet his doctrinal views were orthodox, or he would not have passed as he did, the District Meeting and the Missionary Committee; and there is no insinuation that he had changed his views from the time of his passing the Missionary Committee, until the time that Mr. Davis made his Communications to that body, or that he had apostatized either in doctrine

or practice; he has, all along, acted in an ingenuous and candid manner, had been firm and uncompromising, he veered not at all and there was at most but a "*shade of difference*" between his views and those of the most orthodox; had he altered his views or apostatized in his practice, there would have been cause for a fresh examination, but he had not, and therefore, I think Mr. Davis should have done to him as he is represented, though incorrectly, to have done to another individual, "*just have let her alone*;" instead of this, he who had never spoken a word to the individual on the subject, & knew nothing but from the evil speaking of others, took upon him to upset the decisions of the Quarterly Meeting, the District Meeting, and the Missionary Committee. Thus we see "one sinner destroyeth much good." I am warranted from Mr. Bennett's statement to me to say, Mr. D. had not spoken a word to him on the subject in question before he wrote to the Missionary Committee concerning him. I am sorry you should have endeavoured to make it appear, that Mr. Davis had not received the letter, containing his appointment for Greece, from the Missionary Committee, until two days after he wrote his letter; because the date of the letter in conjunction with the Post mark, detects any mistake on that point, and it is very easy to shew that Mr. Ben-

nett's remarks concerning it are true ; and as to his not having made sacrifices in order to go as a Missionary, there are "Facts against Fiction," for that statement, and even Mr. Macdonald himself (I have heard it said repeatedly) in his missionary speeches at Belper, Wirksworth, and Burton, set forth the sacrifices which a man *must make*, who goes out on that errand.

Am sorry you should not have availed yourself of the ample opportunities you have had, of ascertaining whether Mr. Toase had executed the trust committed to him or not, before you published your statement, because the facilities are so great; but in some cases "*ignorance is bliss*" therefore "'tis folly to be wise."

From all this we see clearly Mr. Bennett has been shamefully used, and no wonder if he in a state of excitement called Mr. D. *a Pope*, (this designation however was not applied to him, till after the expulsion,) but Sir, he has a very serious charge against you for making use of what was said to you in confidence, and of giving a different gloss to it, in order to serve your purpose, and it is the opinion of many that if equal advantage were taken of your confidential communications, they would not appear much to your credit in the eyes of your best friends ; hoping you will pardon the liberty I take in

thus trespassing on your time and patience,
and that you will ascribe it to the proper
motive, a wish to serve the cause of God,

I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your's respectfully,

JOHN SMITH.

Belper, May 19th, 1832.

T. Ward, Printer, 45, Sadler Gate, Derby.

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